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SUBJECT: CODEL HYDE DISCUSSIONS ON ITALIAN EU PRESIDENCY
PRIORITY WITH DPM FINI AND PARLIAMENT

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini and Members of the Italian Parliament told CODEL Hyde that improving the transatlantic relationship was a priority for the Italian EU Presidency. Fini said that the GOI recognizes and appreciates the sacrifices America has made to preserve freedom in Europe, and believes the EU and the US need close cooperation to prevent the spread of WMD. He said that the GOI wants to overcome differences on biotech issues during its Presidency, and said patent protection is crucial to fueling continued investment and wealth creation. MPs stressed development of a European Procurement Agency as a longer-term goal to achieve a common market for military research, development and procurement, increasing efficiency and economies of scale. Italy is aware of the need to confront rogue states that support terrorism and jeopardize international peace. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) From June 27 through July 2, a Congressional Delegation led by HIRC Chairman Henry Hyde visited Rome for Transatlantic Legislature Dialogue (TLD) meetings with Members of the European Parliament, and meetings with GOI officials to discuss GOI priorities for the Italian EU Presidency and bilateral economic and Political issues. (SEPTELS report TLD and economic bilateral meetings). Ambassador Sembler accompanied the CODEL to the meetings with Fini and the Italian Parliament. CODEL members joining Chairman Hyde in the meetings with Fini and MPs were: Reps Jo Ann Davis, Henry Waxman, John Mica, Phil English, Ed Whitfield, Randy Forbes, Diane Watson, Katherine Harris, Thaddeus G. McCotter, and Candice Miller.

¶3. (SBU) Deputy PM Fini opened the July 1 meeting with a warm welcome to Chairman Hyde and other delegates. Noting Italy's assumption of the EU Presidency was to begin that day, Fini offered a sketch of the GOI's priorities. Improving the transatlantic relationship is a top priority, and Italy recognizes and appreciates the sacrifices America has made preserving freedom in Europe. During its six-month Presidency the GOI hopes to guide the EU towards continued partnership with the U.S., not rivalry.

¶4. (SBU) Fini made clear the EU had a responsibility, and the ability, to fight the GWOT alongside the U.S. He agreed with the need to improve aviation security. Fini believes the EU and the U.S. need close cooperation to prevent the spread of nuclear arms, and promised the GOI would focus on encouraging the EU to pursue additional inspections in Iran and provide aid to countries that cooperate in halting WMD proliferation. In the war on drugs Italy stands shoulder to shoulder with the U.S., and is the second largest contributor to UN anti-drug efforts after the United States. Fini did caution that foreign policy choices often have adverse consequences, pointing out the rapid rise in opium production that followed the Taliban's fall.

¶5. (SBU) On IPR, Fini underscored his support for the initiatives of Minister of Productive Activities Marzano, and said that patent protection is crucial to fueling continued investment and wealth creation. He acknowledged that the fight against world hunger and poverty could be won with the assistance of biotech and GMOs. The GOI wants to work towards overcoming differences on biotech issue during its Presidency, but the issue might be one where friends should agree to disagree. Fini agreed hydrogen fuel cells were potentially useful if they raise the quality of life, but expressed concern that governments not ignore potential negative effects on auto workers.

¶6. (SBU) Just prior to ending their meeting, Chairman Hyde thanked the GOI for its cooperation in the Middle East, noting with gratitude that PM Berlusconi did not meet with Arafat on a recent Middle East visit. Fini said the GOI considers the success of the roadmap critical to the peace process and hopes the Quartet will continue to play a key role. Palestinian PM Abu Mazen was invited to Rome in July, and Fini mentioned a possible peace conference in Sicily during the fall.

¶7. (U) Immediately following the Fini meeting, the CODEL

met Chamber Defense Committee Chair Luigi Ramponi, Foreign Affairs Vice Chair Dario Rivolta, and the Chamber's Alternate Representative to the European Convention (and ranking opposition member on the Foreign Affairs Committee) Valdo Spini.

¶8. (SBU) Defense Chairman Ramponi (a member of the second party in the governing coalition, National Alliance, AN) emphasized development of Europe's self-defense capability,

increased defense spending (within economic realities), using the entry of the ten new EU members to improve Europe's defense, and coordination of European defense against terrorism. The latter, he noted, should rely not only on military means, but even more on integrating intelligence and law enforcement capabilities of all partners. Ramponi also stressed development of a European Procurement Agency as a longer-term goal to achieve a common market for military research, development and procurement, increasing efficiency and economies of scale. Ramponi urged the delegation to note Italy's extensive support for international peacekeeping operations (which they did in their responses and questions), despite budgetary limitations and domestic political pressures. "We're with you in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Kosovo, and elsewhere," Ramponi said, "despite our admittedly low spending on defense."

¶9. (SBU) Cong. Forbes sought Ramponi's evaluation of the implications of U.S. force transformation in Europe. Ramponi acknowledged that different threats in Europe after the Cold War could justify a reduction and relocation in U.S. forces. "I would understand if you must reduce and would not think you are abandoning Europe politically," he said.

¶10. (SBU) Cong. Harris praised the reconstruction contributions of smaller, specialized Italian teams in Afghanistan and asked for further contributions of small teams to security outside Kabul. She asked for clarification on the GOI request that the USG confirm that the 173rd Airborne had parachuted into a permissive environment in northern Iraq in the first week of Operation Iraqi Freedom; what did this imply for future cooperation? Ramponi was pleased with the recognition of Italy's specialized contributions. Outlining Italy's on-going contributions in Afghanistan, however, he implied further concurrent involvement was unlikely. He suggested that involvement outside Kabul would require a new UN decision. He explained some of the political pressure on the GOI during the Iraq war; it had requested confirmation of the 173rd's mission in order to defuse opposition allegations that the GOI had lied about use of Italian territory to launch military strikes against Iraq. Ambassador Sembler clarified the constitutional restrictions under which Italy had operated.

¶11. (SBU) Rivolta (foreign affairs spokesman for PM Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) party) highlighted Italy's pride at being a "special friend" of the U.S., adding that Italy cannot see a Europe that does not cooperate closely with the U.S. Even in France and Germany, politicians know that the future of Europe is with the United States. Europe can be a stronger and better partner to the U.S. if it is united, Rivolta continued. Coordinating, rather than duplicating, will allow Europe to increase its defense spending as the U.S. has requested. Italy is aware of the need to confront rogue states that support terrorism and jeopardize international peace. Together, we can defeat their weapons, but, Rivolta added, we must also defeat the sympathy some feel toward those who engage in terrorism.

¶12. (SBU) Cong. Miller asked if possible American force restructuring in Europe would be perceived as retaliation, particularly if troops in Germany and France were reduced. Admitting that it was difficult for him to evaluate German or French reaction, Rivolta opined that if such a change occurred now, it could be perceived as a rupture. Cong. Watson asked Rivolta to elaborate on Italy's relations with Syria and Iran. Rivolta suggested Italy's continued dialogue with Syria might bring Damascus closer to U.S. (and Western) views. Iran was a tougher case. He had hoped for a quicker, easier transformation there.

¶13. (SBU) Cong. Tancredo asked if Italy shared U.S. concerns on human trafficking; how could we ensure more aggressive prosecution of perpetrators? Rivolta replied that Italy is particularly exposed to the evils of trafficking with its huge coastline. He explained Italy's overall concerns with immigration and trafficking, noting their importance in Italy's EU Presidency program. He mentioned the discussion of whether to assist Libya with its ability to interdict illegal immigration flows by relaxing the embargo against Qaddafi.

¶14. (SBU) Spini (member of opposition Democrats of the Left, DS) highlighted the critical importance of the Berlin-Plus agreement, noting it was yet to be resolved

whether the EU or NATO would authorize use of the 60,000-person Rapid Reaction Force. Practically, he observed, it would have to be NATO, although not all European

nations would agree. Spini expressed optimism that differences over the Iraq war would lead to new understanding and cooperation.

¶15. (SBU) Cong. Harris asked about new members' ability to enforce immigration policy. Spini emphasized the importance of European integration in diminishing tensions from formerly-disputed borders between now-united nations. The Ambassador asked Spini if the opposition supported PM Berlusconi's calls to expand the EU to Russia and Israel. No, Spini replied -- closer association with Russia, especially through NATO, was important, but Russia's economy is too different and too large to permit incorporation into the EU at this time. Turning to Turkey's possible entry to the EU, Spini said there were advantages and disadvantages to the entry of the first Muslim country to a currently Christian Union. For Israel, he urged involvement through a strong Mediterranean relationship now, with closer association after peace.

¶16. (U) The CODEL did not clear this telegram prior to departing Rome.

Sembler

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